

IN HONOR OF CATHERINE “CAT”
CARLTON

HON. JACKIE SPEIER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 15, 2020

Ms. SPEIER. Madam Speaker and members, I rise today to recognize Catherine Carlton, known as “Cat” by her community, for her eight years of service on the city council of Menlo Park. It’s been a remarkable time for this native of Tarrant County, Texas, who eventually made her way west to lead her dynamic community astride San Francisco Bay.

Catherine graduated with a Bachelors in Rhetoric and Public Communications from Tulane University and received her MBA at the Cass Business School in London where she was president of her class and graduated with Deans Honors. She worked in Hong Kong for 10 years for, among others, Equant and for a company that she founded and managed—Search Bank. During her global business career, she has worked at eight different companies.

Menlo Park is a community of 35,000. Its daytime population swells by thousands as high technology employees stream into globally competitive businesses, including Facebook. After moving to town, Catherine became immersed in her new community.

Catherine was appointed to the parks and recreation commission in 2009 and served until elected to the city council in 2012. She joined as the Great Recession and its impact on city finances ebbed. In 2012, local measure K passed. It increased the hotel occupancy tax. Ultimately, these revenues and others made possible upgrades to the city’s parks

and libraries, among several other worthy initiatives supported by Catherine.

With the explosive expansion of Facebook and other high technology companies, Catherine and her colleagues were repeatedly called upon to guide the community’s growth so that it did not overwhelm residents. For example, when a major project at Willow Road and Highway 101 commenced, Catherine and the council tried to ensure that it concluded as quickly as possible. It was a huge thread-the-needle project with long lines of cars slowly snaking in various directions over many months. While the end result is a great interchange, Catherine spent many hours of council time listening to nearby neighbors. She and her colleagues worked hard to reduce negative impacts when possible.

During her time on the council, Catherine represented Menlo Park on twelve regional committees or agencies. These included the Peninsula Clean Energy Authority, C/CAG, the Airport Community Roundtable, and an ad hoc council committees on parking.

She is a passionate advocate for local businesses. Now, with the pandemic restricting many downtown merchants, Catherine and her colleagues are adapting Menlo Park so that dining in downtown streets is possible. Pedestrians and bicyclists (walking their bikes) support restaurants and merchants.

We often hear the expression, “Out of the frying pan, into the fire.” It would be simple to describe sitting on the Menlo Park council from 2012 to the present in those terms given the yin and yang of long-running explosive job growth followed by pandemic-induced restrictions. However, this would be an incomplete picture. Many wonderful things happened over the past eight years under Cat’s leadership and guidance.

The city is revitalized with longtime vacant lots on the El Camino Real sporting new office buildings. Parks are refreshed, the libraries upgraded, and long-needed infrastructure investments were made. Crime—never a significant problem in Menlo Park—remains low. Issues related to community-wide planning were dealt with. The city’s schools remain strong and its families treasure the environment, including its bayfront park and tree canopied streets.

A mother of two young children, Catherine and George, Cat helped run her daughter’s Girl Scout troop and volunteered with AYSO. She was the vice president of her homeowner’s association and served on the board of the Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired. She volunteered as an after-school tutor. Her volunteer work for the Junior League led to her support of Project Read, Foster Families and HIP Housing. She was a board member and past president of the Las Lomas Education Foundation. She worked with state legislators on legislation to address human trafficking and domestic violence. In all, she served as a volunteer with over nine nonprofits or associations dealing with local and state subjects touching youth, women, and quality-of-life issues.

Catherine Carlton has played an important role in all of these achievements. Now she, husband Robert Ridenour, and their children will have more time together. This is likely welcomed by everyone in the family after years of her intense dedication to neighbors and to the future of the community that she loves. I was honored to know and to work with Catherine Carlton, and I wish her all the best in the years ahead.